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L E T T E R S

TO

THE REV. VICESIMUS KNOX, D.D.

OCCASIONED BY HIS REFLECTIONS ON

UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS

IN HIS

"ADVERTISEMENT,"

PREFIXED TO

A VOLUME OF HIS SERMONS,

LATELY PUBLISHED.

TO US THERE *is* BUT ONE GOD, THE FATHER, FROM WHOM
ARE ALL THINGS, AND WE FOR HIM; AND ONE LORD
JESUS CHRIST, THROUGH WHOM *are* ALL THINGS, AND WE
THROUGH HIM.

1 Cor. viii. 6.

THIS INDEED I CONFESS UNTO THEE, THAT ACCORDING
TO THAT DOCTRINE, WHICH THEY CALL A HERESY, SO
PAY I RELIGIOUS SERVICE TO THE GOD OF MY FATHERS;
BELIEVING ALL THAT IS WRITTEN THROUGHOUT THE
LAW, AND IN THE PROPHETS.

Acts xxiv. 14.

BY JOHN DISNEY, D.D.F.S.A.

L O N D O N,

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

M DCC XCII.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

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TO THE REV. DR. KNOX.

LETTER I.

REV. SIR,

A VOLUME of "SERMONS, chiefly intended to promote faith, hope, and charity," bearing your name in the title-page, was very lately put into my hands by a friend.

The "advertisement" prefixed to them was the chief subject of our conversation before we separated from each other. When I returned home and reflected on the apparent design and general tendency of your preliminary advertisement, I was confirmed in my opinion that this inauspicious declaration of your creed,—the nature of your "faith," the foundation of your "hope," and the extent of your "charity," was deserving of some remarks. To endeavour to sooth the friends of any established system into ignominious sleep, or to attempt to rouse the dæmons of persecution, does not form any part of the consistent or honorable employment of the christian and the protestant. It is very

unbecoming the learned and enlightened christian, (meaning by those appellations, a christian enlightened by the proper application of profane literature to sacred subjects,) to rest his theories upon the prejudices of ignorant, or to irritate the passions of ferocious bigots: the former have been already too much cherished, and the others too much inflamed in our own day, and in our own nation. And he who fans the fire is equally answerable for the mischief it occasions, with him who raised or communicated the first spark. In law there are no accessories in high treason, and in justice there are none in persecution.

I cannot but consider, sir, the cause of the divine unity as depreciated, and the character of unitarian christians as aspersed before the world by your "advertisement." Both the aspersion of the one, and the depreciation of the other, are compressed in so short a compass, and dispatched in so summary a way, that you appear to have as little regarded the usual forms of justice, as the real state of the case in respect to matter of fact. It has been said of a person who wished the destruction of his neighbour's dog, which, however, he did not chuse to effect by open violence and outrage, that for his own better security, and the *ease of his conscience* he contented himself

himself with giving the devoted animal a bad name, and leaving the execution of his intention to those who would listen to his calumnies.

The present temper of the times too much disposes churchmen to lend a willing ear to every suggestion that is calculated to render unitarian christians obnoxious to popular odium and resentment. They have disregarded reasons strong as holy writ, and violated the dearest rights of men and christians: they have destroyed the sacred and invaluable repositories of the first divine and philosopher of our age; of one, who is truly great in all that is truly estimable. I am persuaded, however, that Britons, christians, and protestants will, ere long, walk in the ways of truth and of a sound mind; and that the momentary delirium of intolerance will be succeeded by an age of reformation, and equal liberty. The time cannot be far distant, when they will receive with open arms every fellow-creature as their brother, and every fellow-christian as their companion, and familiar friend.

However inapprehensive you may have been of the evil consequences of your "advertisement," I am fully persuaded that it will tend to mislead the public judgment. Its probable effect, upon

such part of the dignified or undignified multitude as may read it, will be, to fix every prejudice already formed, or to re-kindle every malignant passion.

The questions between us are not of a private, but a public nature ; not trifling or merely speculative opinions, but opinions of high importance to the best interests of mankind. And during our sojourning here, we are each answerable for the honest application of our understanding for discovering the mind and will of God, as we read them in the books of nature and revelation ; and equally bound to follow the deliberate convictions of our own consciences.

You will find your “ advertisement” reprinted entire ; and the successive portions of it placed as the text, or subjects of my future letters. Thus you will be left to speak for yourself ; and, I trust, I shall not be found any where to have misrepresented your meaning, as I am confident I have no other design than to contribute to the advancement of truth.

I am, Rev. SIR,

Your's &c.

“ It

“ It is not my intention, in the following pages, to
 “ engage in theological controversy; but I am sensible,
 “ that it will appear from them, that I am a believer in the
 “ doctrine of the trinity. This belief will expose me to
 “ the attacks of those who condemn, without justice or
 “ mercy, whatever militates against unitarian opinions.
 “ I therefore solicit the general reader’s candour against
 “ the unitarian’s severity; and hope he will allow me to
 “ retain the opinions in which I have been educated, and
 “ in which I am confirmed by choice, without loading
 “ me with the imputation of insincerity, *irrational* religion
 “ or *want of liberality*.”

Dr. Knox’s “Advertisement.”

LETTER II.

REV. SIR,

IT is not because you are “ a believer in the doctrine of the trinity,” (which you seem terribly apprehensive that PROPER PERSONS should not notice) that I have commenced my present correspondence with you. And as you have been pleased to go somewhat out of your way to deprecate the unitarian christian’s “ severity,” in a manner, if not insidious, certainly ungenerous, I find the greater difficulty to persuade myself that you had “ no intention to engage in theological controversy.” To

insult a fellow-traveller is not the most probable way to escape his observation: and to injure his character is the least likely method to command his silence.

Theological controversy is only a technical term for inquiry and examination into our several religious opinions. Without this controversy, heathenism would have prevented the first propagation of christianity; without this controversy, popery would have been the established religion of Great Britain at this day. The intemperate zeal and violence of partizans have brought it into disrepute with the unthinking multitude. But high-churchmen and unbelievers have been most clamorous against it: the former, have discovered that though it may occasionally advance an individual to a bishopric, the principles of high-churchmen have been reprobated in the same proportion as they have been understood; the latter, have observed the most expert advocates of those principles to retire, abashed and confounded by the evidences of christianity, whenever they have been examined by reason and argument, unfettered by the establishment and authority of any particular church, to decide upon their sufficiency and credibility.

The

The angry temper with which these inquiries and investigations have too often been conducted, is not to be imputed to the religion or doctrines which either party is engaged to support, as such; but to the unjust preference which the civil power has given to the one before the other. It is this exclusive establishment, which protects the one, and proscribes the other, that makes brothers fall out by the way. The further consequence is no more than natural; on the one hand, we may observe a jealousy of an obtruded authority; on the other, a pertinacity in vindicating established opinions, the most absurd and indefensible. The churchman becomes suspected in his integrity, and the dissenter is declared a restless innovator. I trust, however, that theological controversy, by which I mean a free and fair inquiry into the rights of christian and protestant churches, and into the truth or falsehood of the doctrines maintained by them, will go on, and finally, that truth and right will prevail. Churchmen, I hope, will be persuaded that it is expedient to moderate their expectations and demands as the day of reason and reformation advances; but of this I am convinced, that they will not be able to retard it by STIFLING, and can accelerate it by nothing more than by INTOLERANCE.

You

You are pleased, sir, to arrest the compassion of your reader in your behalf, at the very instant when you appear conscious of having raised the indignation of your adversary. Your orthodox faith, you say, “ will expose you to the attacks “ of those who condemn, without justice or “ mercy, whatever militates against unitarian “ opinions.” This charge may be repelled by asking you one plain and simple question,—What condemnation has been passed upon those multifarious writings which militate against unitarian opinions, beyond reason, scripture and argument? The unitarian’s inquisition inflicts no tortures, nor threatens any penalties upon his adversaries; he knows no offenders, except those who sin against their own conscience, and contents himself with consigning them to the reproach of their own minds. With respect to those, who, after serious and dispassionate inquiry, are differently persuaded from him, he does not hesitate to say, they are as much to be respected by man, and justified before God, as himself. The unitarian wishes not to make any appeal to the civil magistrate under the sanction of law, nor to burn the habitations of any of his brethren of mankind in violation of it.

Having

Having indiscriminately impeached the unitarian writers of being void of "justice and mercy," by a circuitous insinuation calculated to excite some sympathy for the situation in which you have placed yourself, you proceed to "solicit the general reader's candour against the unitarian's severity." This precipitate solicitation of your reader's candour before you knew the kind or degree of reprehension you were to receive from your proscribed unitarian, seems to shew a consciousness that you deserved it; and very much resembles the mischievous behaviour of a school-boy who throws a stone at a window, and runs away before he knows the success or failure of his design. And in both cases, the administration of justice tempered with mercy, will be construed by the delinquent into "severity."

The modest manner in which you sue to be "allowed to retain the opinions in which you have been educated, and in which you are confirmed by choice," amounts to a toleration, very short of what the most rigid unitarian would give you. He would allow you not only to "retain," but to propagate and defend your opinions, and in every case, civil
and

and religious, to enjoy the same liberty he claims for himself.

From your representation your reader would be led to imagine that all severity of language was confined to unitarians. Read the charges and correspondence of bishop Horsey, and direct me, if you can, to a controversial writer in theology who has shewn equal insolence and intolerance; who has more disfigured and discredited the religion of the gospel, or more debased the rights of protestants by his writings. His temper convulsed the philosophical society of which he is a member, and his counsels would convulse the established church. But Bonner and Gardiner were undesigning instruments of one reformation; H—— B—— and C—— may be the same of another.

Surely, sir, the prejudices of education ought not to be indulged; they would have kept our forefathers in darkness, and now blind the eyes of their children. The great object of education, excuse my saying this to you, is to make us more competent to chuse and determine for ourselves, and to enable us to examine, and, if occasion require, to correct every prejudice, by unlearning what we may have prematurely learned.

learned. If, therefore, you are confirmed in your opinions, because you have been educated in them, your choice is determined by prejudice, not by examination and rational conviction. I do not say that such is your case, but I fear it is the case of many; of many, who are active and vigilant in every literary research but that of their bible; and who exercise a liberty that does them much honor upon every subject except religion, which has the first and strongest claim to it.

A choice thus determined is the result of weakness; and if influenced by worldly motives is prevarication and insincerity. And, however, you may spurn at the ascription of "*irrational religion*," according to the sense in which that expression is used, it is very clear to me, that no religion which is contradictory to human reason, was ever designed by almighty God for the use of man. I have no means of judging of the truth or falsehood of christianity, but by the exercise of my reason: if that were not satisfied with the evidences by which it is supported, and with the doctrines which it teaches, it could not be received by me as a divine revelation. No mission from heaven can reveal to me, what my reasoning faculty is incapable of understanding.

The

The attempt to supersede my reason would detect the imposture; in other words, if I were not a rational christian, I should be a deist.

“The want of liberality” is indeed a grievous deficiency; but some persons have great expertness in transferring the consequence of an argument into a personal crimination of an adversary, which was, perhaps, the last thing in the thoughts of the supposed accuser. For instance; when it has been said, that subscription to articles of faith is a temptation and a snare to the sincerity of the clergy, no more is said than what is strictly just and true; and an exhortation to the subscriber to consider well this matter, is no unreasonable advice to the aspirant after ecclesiastical preferment. I may even be allowed to suggest this precaution to Dr. Knox, or any other rising man, without giving any just cause of offence. Several good men have acknowledged their embarrassments even in stronger terms than the dignitary who avowedly declared he “could not afford to keep a conscience.” When the barrier of all principle is thus disregarded, I can conceive the mind greatly relaxed in its sense of the obligation of truth, though I will as readily conclude that the individual is only disposed to admit the dangerous
guest

guest in the shape of ecclesiastical subscription. But no language of reproof can so strongly expose this crying evil, as the reflections of the afflicted minds of some of those who have suffered the slender covering of a cobweb to conceal the deformity of the practice, and who are so encompassed on the right hand and on the left, that they know not how to extricate themselves from their difficulties, and expiate their offence by the loss or hazard of this world's goods.

These reflections are not applied to you personally. I am now writing to the public, as well as to yourself; and though every man is interested in the subject as a member of that public,—as an individual “his faith, hope, and charity,” may not be affected by them.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

“ If

" If I err in this point, I err with very wise and good
" men ; and my error is injurious to no man."

Dr. Knox's " Advertisement."

L E T T E R III.

REV. SIR,

You may think that any notice of so harmless a salvo favours a little of the " unitarian's severity." You must, however, excuse my observing that your apology, couched in the extract placed at the head of my present letter, would in its full extent go to excuse, what I am persuaded you would condemn. It is, therefore, very dangerous to adopt false general principles, only to cover the errors of particular persons. It is like violating a leading and essential principle of our happy civil constitution, in order to screen or to oppress one unfortunate delinquent.

It has been said of the late king, George the second, that upon application being made to him by a certain nobleman in behalf of a relation of his lordship, then under sentence of the law, the consideration of the disgrace in which
it

it would involve the noble family was strenuously urged as a plea for mercy. The king rejected the suit, observing, "If I understand the case rightly, the noble lord wishes to transfer the disgrace from himself and his family to me and my family." In the same manner, one who seeks a defence of a suspicious conduct in the example of others, and makes use of their names to effect his escape, while he wishes to transfer the blame of the example to them, considers himself as following it with impunity.

Besides, this plea is by no means new; but it gave occasion some thousand years ago to the divine precept, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." Very wise and good men are sometimes overreached by designing knaves, as well in matters of great importance, as in the common affairs of life. But, will this excuse the contemplative student pinning his faith on their sleeve, and becoming, by his ready acquiescence, a volunteer in the service of error? And, to say that "such error is injurious to no man," is to misapprehend and mistake the fact. It is to add strength to the infatuating influence of example, by giving as much weight to error as an individual can put into the scale.

B

The

The late bishop Hallifax, in a sermon preached before the university of Cambridge in the year 1771, in defence of subscription, when the clerical petition was in agitation, exhorted the younger part of his auditors to be "scrupulous
 "in rejecting, or conceiving lightly of, esta-
 "blished doctrines, in the belief of which the
 "wisest men have lived and died*". Upon this passage it has been very properly remarked,
 "Surely this argument requires no confutation.
 "Have not multitudes of accomplished cha-
 "racters lived and died in the profession of the
 "Romish faith; and can we doubt, but that
 "many truly pious and learned members of
 "that communion are existing at this hour,
 "ornaments alike to religion and humanity?
 "Do we not think, notwithstanding, that the
 "church of Rome, so ancient and so extensive,
 "has yet erred: and other churches, however
 "respectable, may err also. Remember, we
 "shall be judged, hereafter, for *our own* con-
 "duct and opinions, and not for the conduct
 "and opinions of *other* men†."

Some

* See "Hallifax's Three Sermons," 8vo. 1772. 3d edit. p. 51.

† See Wakefield's "Enquiry into the opinions of the christian writers of the three first centuries." 8vo. 1784. p. xxxix of the address to the clergy.

Nothing need be added to the preceding extract, unless, indeed, we cite this one truth from the articles of the established church, concerning whose general credit and estimation I stay not to enquire. The article says, “ As
 “ the churches of Hierusalem, Alexandria, and
 “ Antioch, have erred ; so also the church of
 “ Rome hath erred ; not only in their liv-
 “ ing and manner of ceremonies, but also in
 “ matters of faith * ;” and as I hold this opinion, in common with yourself, I am concerned to observe you to seek countenance and protection from the error of any church, or the names of any christians, how respectable soever. For, if that church which claims to be *always right* can err, so may that church which *never* allows herself to be *wrong*. But, in case you agree with your church in another article, that
 “ they are to be had accursed, that presume to
 “ say, that every man shall be saved by the law
 “ or sect which he professeth, so that he be dili-
 “ gent to frame his life according to that law,
 “ and the light of nature †,” your error is, in my opinion, so far from being harmless, that it is injurious to the credit of christianity, injurious to the greater part of mankind, and injurious to

B 2

your

* See Article xix.

† See Article xviii.

your own mind. You will find a like-minded theologian in bishop Horsley, but when I first read the charge which is now before me *, my judgment was suspended, and is not yet settled, whether he was serious and in earnest, or only chose to echo forth, in sonorous tone, the language of an ordinance of the church to the ears of the Welch clergy. This anathematizing spirit is at once the parent and the child of theological insolence, as well as alternately the cause and the effect of a long train of ills fatal to our present happiness, and to every promising prospect in respect to our future state.

Leaving you to the enjoyment of all the consolation you can now expect to receive from the mere countenance of great names, you must excuse an abrupt conclusion.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Yours, &c.

* See his " Charge to the clergy of St. David's, delivered at his primary visitation 1790."

" I censure

" I censure none who sincerely differ from me, ac-
 " tuated by the unprejudiced dictates of their con-
 " sciences; but I cannot but lament, that so many in-
 " genious persons should be *zealously lowering our saviour*
 " *in the opinion of his followers.* The higher opinion his
 " followers entertain of him, the more willing will they
 " be to obey him. What good can ensue from teach-
 " ing wretched human creatures to think less highly of
 " him to whom they have been taught from their youth
 " to look up for comfort in the day of distress, and at
 " the approach of death? What evil can ensue from
 " paying him higher honours than he might possibly
 " claim? This may shew our gratitude at least; and if
 " it be an error, must be venial. It would be better to
 " dispute less eagerly, and love and obey more faith-
 " fully."

Dr. Knox's "Advertisement."

LETTER IV.

REV. SIR.

THE very catholic sentiment which introduces }
 the preceding extract to your reader's notice, }
 may very reasonably lay claim to his "candour," }
 and repress even the "unitarian's severity." And }
 if this liberality of expression had pervaded your }
 "advertisement," you certainly would not have

B 3

heard

heard from your present correspondent ; but I was, and continue to be, strongly impressed with an opinion that it contains " more than meets the eye," I see, or think I see, a design, under the pretence of an accommodating plausible address, to render the doctrine of the divine unity odious, and the persons of unitarians unpopular.

But, sir, to " lower our saviour in the opinion of his followers," is a relative term ; and may be deserving of commendation or blame. To degrade him from the character in which the scriptures have placed him, would indeed be highly blame worthy ; but to lower him from the mistaken and fanciful elevation to which the good intentions of some of his followers have exalted him, and to consider him in his own proper character and office, Jesus the promised messiah, is a labour becoming the faithful servant of God and affectionate disciple of Christ. This is the great question upon which we are divided, and a question, in which we have nothing to do with any appeal to the authority of names or numbers. The scriptures, interpreted by ourselves, can alone be our guide and counsellors ; and when each of us have candidly examined the only evidence that is admissible, we must decide for ourselves, not for each other.

other. There is no argument that can be used in defence of the superior authority of either of us, that will not equally apply to both. Decrees of councils and acts of parliament will avail nothing, except to raise suspicions against the party who appeals to them.

In support of your reprobation of the doctrine of unitarianism, you say "the higher opinion of his followers entertain of Christ, the more willing will they be to obey him." I am most ready to acknowledge our duty to obey his precepts, and, I will also add, to follow his example. But my obedience does not rest so much on my opinion of him, as on my opinion of the authority by which he acted; and the very high opinion which the trinitarian must necessarily entertain of his person, is certainly an hindrance to the imitation of his character. For, how can I apply the example of Christ to myself, and expect to walk as he also walked, when by ascribing to him two natures, I am left infinitely behind him in the means to accomplish the end. As well might a pigmy keep pace with a giant; or a small rivulet run the course of the ocean.

“What good,” it is asked, “can ensue from
 “teaching wretched human creatures to think
 “less highly of him to whom they have been
 “taught from their youth to look up for com-
 “fort in the day of distress, and at the approach
 “of death?” The question of the equality of
 Jesus Christ with the one God and father of all,
 is not to be determined by any measure of ex-
 pediency, but by scripture and reason. Being
 myself an unitarian, who maintain the unrivalled
 majesty of God, without peer or equal, the one
 only creator and governor of the world, I am
 not backward to declare that very considerable
 and essential good is to be expected from teach-
 ing human creatures just and worthy conceptions
 of the deity in the first place, and just and
 worthy notions of his great messenger and pro-
 phet Jesus Christ, in the next; whether these
 conceptions are agreeable to received opinions
 is no part of my concern. So much deference
 to established opinions as shall make us consider
 our inquiry more attentively than we otherwise
 should do, is very commendable, and where the
 question may be doubtful, and the moral expe-
 diency clearly in favour of the opinion generally
 received, I should pay still greater respect to the
 public judgment. But on the present occasion,
 I must say, that to lead people to think of “the
 mediator

mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," as being the one self-existing God ; that he is the mediator with himself ; or that he is perfect God and perfect man, is to make " wretched human creatures" more wretched than they otherwise would be ; it is to teach them to be idolaters in worshiping the creature instead of the creator ; it is holding out false and delusive hopes, and weakening the security of a virtuous course in the declaration that " without holiness no one shall see the Lord."

If our education should unhappily have taught us " to look up for comfort in the day of distress, and at the approach of death," unto the man Christ Jesus, and to consider our salvation as wholly depending on the atonement he hath made for us to himself, it is the more necessary that we learn to turn unto the Lord our God, Jehovah, and commit ourselves to the mercy and goodness of that only being who is capable of hearing our petitions, of knowing our necessities, and of effecting the good purposes of his providence.

" What evil can ensue from paying him [our
 " favour] higher honours than he might possibly
 " claim ?" This question may be answered by
 the

the recital and application of a command still in force; "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you," says the mosaic law, "neither shall you diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." But, the presumptive argument which you here use, may, with equal propriety, be applied to the vindication of the worship of Mary the mother of Jesus, of the romish saints, and of the consecrated wafer: and the question would then be asked, What evil can ensue from paying them higher honours than they might possibly claim?

There is a medal of Adrian VI. struck at Rome, which has, on its reverse, a representation of his holiness sitting in a chair, on each side a cardinal or bishop placing the tiara on his head, with a suitable attendance of inferior clergy, and bearing this motto,—*QUEM CREANT ADORANT* *. You need not take offence at the recital of this circumstance; for there is no difference between the worshipper of the man Jesus Christ, or the man Adrian; both were born and died;

* Now in the collection of a friend. Adrian VI. was born at Utrecht, elected pope Jan. 9, 1522, and died Sept. 14, 1523.

died ; and how much soever I may prefer the character and office of Christ to those of his pretended vicar, both were men, and consequently neither of them proper objects of religious adoration.

Socinus, who believed in the humanity of Christ, worshipped him ; and the romanists, who had raised Adrian to the papal chair, worshipped the man whom themselves had elevated. The notions and practice of both were equally degrading of the supreme being.

To whom, or how does this ascription of divine honours to Christ “ shew our gratitude ” ? And how comes it to pass that this error “ must be venial,” where a capacity of knowing better is given us ? Is our gratitude to Christ to precede or extinguish our gratitude to his God and our God, the giver of every good ? Or, tell me, how we can better demonstrate our gratitude to the lord and master, whose disciples we profess ourselves, than, like himself, to labour to do the will of him who sent him ? It was the meat and drink of our blessed master to do the will of God, his heavenly father, in all things ; and the lesson to us was not “ fall down and worship me,”

me," but "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy
" God, and him only shalt thou serve."

The concluding sentence of the extract placed at the head of my present letter, may not be considered as exceptionable, when properly qualified: "It would be better to dispute less
" eagerly, and love and obey more faithfully," says my text. But I do not see that religious inquiry is inconsistent with the love and obedience expected of us. These are certainly duties, and I wish we were all disposed to inquire, to love, and to obey more eagerly than we are. Let us render, in the first place, to God, the things that are God's; and then to Cæsar, the things that are Cæsar's. But let us not be more loose in our allegiance to the great first cause than to an earthly prince, whom we ourselves have advanced to his dignity in the state; for "though
" there be that are called gods, to us there is
" but one God, the father." Our allegiance to this great and good being is not transferrable, "I am Jehovah; that is my name; and my
" glory will I not give to another, nor my
" praise to the graven images."*

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your's, &c.

" It

* See Isaiah xlii. 8. Dodson's New translation.

" It is, I think, the great purpose of religion, to afford
 " poor human nature (*ægris mortalibus*) a BALSAM FOR
 " THE WOUNDS OF THE HEART. A dependance on
 " the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the assistance of the
 " holy spirit, affords that balsam to thousands and tens
 " of thousands of our fellow creatures in affliction, to
 " whom life would be scarcely supportable without it.
 " Let not then the learned and ingenious labour to
 " extract so sweet an ingredient from the cup of life.
 " Let them rather exert themselves in confirming and
 " extending the salutary belief, than in destroying it.
 " All human creatures, at some period of their chequered
 " lives, want every support that can be found. Religious
 " hope is a main column in the fabric of human felicity.
 " Let the good builder add strength to its foundations,
 " but never undermine it."

Dr. Knox's "Advertisement."

LETTER V.

REV. SIR,

UNDER the name of religion I comprise our
 duty to God, and our neighbour; "there is
 "no other commandment greater than these."

And

And it is the design of the christian religion to afford to man greater encouragement to the practice of virtue, by setting before him the certainty of a future state of retribution according as he shall have done good or evil in this life.

It is very true that thousands and tens of thousands of our fellow-creatures draw much comfort from the supposed "divinity of Jesus Christ, and the assistance of the holy spirit," as a distinct person or being; and it is equally true, that a far greater number receive the same "balsam for the wounds of the heart," from their dependence on penances, auricular confession, the absolution of a priest, the administration of extreme unction, and the saying masses for the dead. But, it is a very suspicious recommendation of a quack-medicine to be told that it applies to every case, or to read accumulated certificates of cures, which are only known in an "advertisement." However, you will not insist upon the prevalence of these doctrines to be a sufficient evidence of their truth or expediency; and the same protestant spirit that can discern the mote that is in our brother's eye, should discover the beam that is in our own eye. But you appear to wish to counteract this christian and protestant precept, by discouraging "the learned and ingenious from labouring to
" extract

“ extract so sweet an ingredient from the cup of
 “ life.” Nay, you even exhort them “ rather
 “ to exert themselves in confirming and extend-
 “ ing the salutary belief, than in destroying it.”
 Upon what principle, consistent with christianity
 and protestantism, you can recommend this con-
 duct so repugnant to both, I am entirely at a loss
 to discover. For my own part, I shudder at the
 principle and the consequence.

We are bidden, when we shall have done all
 the things which are commanded us, to con-
 sider ourselves as unprofitable servants, or as
 having done no favour, for we have only done
 that which it was our duty to do. After the
 acknowledgment of this unprofitableness, unto
 whom are we to look up for mercy and forgive-
 ness, but unto the great and only dispenser of
 mercy and forgiveness, “ the God and father of
 “ our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies and
 “ God of all comfort ; who giveth us comfort in
 “ every affliction, so that we are able to comfort
 “ others in all *their* affliction by that comfort,
 “ wherewith we ourselves are comforted by
 “ God?”*

It may very safely be granted to you, that “ all
 “ human creatures, at some period of their che-
 “ quered

* See 2 Cor. i. 3 and 4. Wakefield's Translation of the
 new Testament.

"quered lives, want every support that can be found." I am as fully persuaded of the truth of this observation, as you can be; and, knowing the truth of it, I would direct them to "seek it where it may be found;" otherwise, it were to trifle with, if not to insult, the ignorant, and to perpetuate the delusion by becalming their minds with false hopes.

"Religious hope is," indeed, "a main column in the fabric of human life." But that hope must be rational as well as religious, or it will probably fail us when we are most in need of its cheering support. If we build our expectation of comfort on any other ground than the mercy and goodness of the kind parent of the universe, we shall probably be disappointed of the promised fruit of our hope in the moment of our greatest distress. "Let" then "the good builder add strength to the foundation," by obeying the word and will of God; "but never undermine it" by human devices and the doctrines of men. At the same time, let this same builder remember that "no one can lay another foundation instead of that already laid, which is Jesus the Christ. And, if any one build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work will become manifest."*

It

* See 1 Cor. iii. 11 and 12, as before.

It may so happen that a building may be weakened by the addition of that which we foolishly imagined would add strength to it; and it may be undermined by that which we intended for its support. But the gospel, like the city waited for by Abraham, "hath foundations, and its contriver and builder is God."

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your's &c.

C

" Let

“Let us walk in the *good old paths* which our fathers
“pointed out to us, whenever we can walk in them
“with perfect safety. They lead to the pleasant regions
“of hope and peace. And in the journey of life, let us
“take especial care, not to fall out by the way; and
“particularly, when the subjects of dispute are speculative
“truths, on which absolute certainty may not perhaps be
“attainable on this side of the grave.”

Dr. Knox's "Advertisement."

LETTER VI.

REV. SIR,

It has been related by common fame, that a certain english gentleman passing near Ferney called upon Voltaire, and announcing to him his intended rout to Rome, jocularly asked the philosopher, whether he had any commands for the pope, to whom he had letters of introduction. Voltaire answered; "When you see the pope, present my respects to him, and tell him, I shall think myself much obliged to him, if he will send me the
eyes

eyes and ears of his inquisitor general." The gentleman is said to have pursued his journey, and in a conference with his holiness, whom he found to be a pleasant good tempered man, did not fail to deliver the message he had in charge, pretty much in the *manner* he received it. Element, with great good sense and equal wit replied, "The philosopher has a mind to be pleasant with an old man, and if you return by Ferney, I desire you will make my proper compliments to him, and assure him that I should have been very glad to have obliged him in his request, if it had been in my power, but tell him from me, that the inquisitor general of Rome has had neither eyes nor ears since Ganganelli has been pope."

From this little anecdote it appears that a pope of Rome, in the midst of the bigotry of his see, was not so much attached to "the *good old paths* which his fathers pointed out," as to think it wrong or impolitic to walk in better. Derham has cited a story, which is also to my present purpose, of an old priest in the time of Henry the eighth, who read *mumpsimus Domine*, for *sumpsimus*: and being admonished of it, he said, "he had done so for thirty years, and would not
leave

leave his old *mumpsimus* for their new *sumpsimus*.*

It occurred to me that I could, in no better way attempt to convince you or your "general reader," than by contrasting the different conduct of the pope and the priest, in order to shew you that as much caution is necessary for our walking with safety in "*good old ways*," as in good new ways. And the truth appears to be, that the greatest security of christians is not to walk with Athanasius, Arius, or Socinus, with Calvin or Arminius; but to walk with Christ and his apostles according to their best apprehension of the new Testament. These and these alone "lead to the pleasant regions of hope and peace;" these talk not the language of Athanasius, Arius, or Socinus; they all declare that God is one, and he only to be worshipped. But if, peradventure, the candid and ingenuous protestant christian, can find in the gospel his beloved trinity,—absolute election and predestination, and a perfect atonement by vicarious sacrifice, let me bid him enjoy these notions and promote them, by all honourable means, among others. If our understandings have been impartially exerted,

and

* See Derham's *Physico-Theology*. Book v. chap. 1. Note (t).

and our hearts are really disposed to act the honest and upright part, which will be required of us, we shall all meet at the last, and seeing things as they are, shall be one flock under one shepherd. There is no occasion, or any adequate temptation, in the journey of life to fall out by the way. We have need of each others help in various ways, and should endeavour to purify and perfect our own minds by an enlarged charity for each other; a charity, which should not only forbid all persecution for conscience sake but prevent the practice of those little arts which are used to stifle inquiry, to repress the discovery of truth, to prejudge questions of importance, to misrepresent the characters and designs of those who differ from the great multitude: a charity, which should resist every unbecoming accomodation to merely popular taste, or our own personal advancement in this world; and, being thus extensive, it would preserve us from the distressing situation of plaintively soliciting for mercy, while we are provoking that severity which we at once deprecate, and deserve.

To represent the unity of God as a speculative opinion, is either not to understand the question, or to undervalue it. It is essential to his existence, and is the base and foundation of all religion, natural

tural and revealed. To deny or to insinuate that "absolute certainty" upon this subject of dispute" may "not perhaps be attainable on this "side of the grave," is to subvert all the possible evidence the case will admit, and to introduce the cheerless waste of universal scepticism.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your's, &c.

January 21, 1792.

JOHN DISNEY.
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F I N I S.

